

Somewhere an edge forms from two sides

by rubberglue

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Summary: Arthur just wants to be left alone, but thanks to fate (in the form of his sister, Morgana), he finds himself sharing his little country hideaway with Gwen Degrance. He's not interested in relationships but with Gwen around, it's getting harder and harder to remember that.

1. Chapter 1

When did squirrels learn to unlock doors? Didn't one need opposable thumbs for that sort of things? Arthur was pretty sure squirrels did not have opposable thumbs, unless his secondary science teacher had lied to him. Frankly, he wouldn't put it past Mr Richards. Arthur suspected that he made up half the stuff he taught the class. And where did the squirrels get the key to the cottage, anyway? Had Morgana buried a spare key somewhere in the garden and they dug it up instead of their nuts?

Arthur sat up in bed, clutching the covers to him as his groggy mind insisting on painting pictures of giant squirrels at the door, fumbling with keys. He blinked, then shook his head.

Yes, that was definitely the door being unlocked. But as his head cleared, he was pretty sure that it wasn't a giant squirrel, which meant that someone was at the door.

Damn. There was a reason he'd bought this isolated cottage and it wasn't so that he could entertain guests.

As quietly as possible, Arthur got out of bed and fumbled in the darkness for some clothes. No way was he going to confront a potential burglar naked. Just as he dug out a pair of shorts from his bag, he heard the lock finally yield to the key and the door open.

No time to dress fully now. Dragging on the shorts, Arthur moved to the bedroom door.

He stepped out gingerly into the bedroom. Before he could touch the light switch, light flooded the living room and Arthur found himself face to face with a woman he didn't recognise. She was short with long, black curls that fell to below her shoulder and bangs that covered her eyes. Clearly not expecting him, she took a step back, her eyes wide and her lush lips slightly open. The dress she had on had thin straps, showing off the line of her shoulders and was short enough that Arthur could see her slender legs.

She was pretty. That was the first thought that popped into his head. It was obvious that his exhaustion hadn't affected his libido.

"You're not a squirrel."

It had definitely affected his brains.

The woman stared at him for a beat, then from somewhere, pulled out what looked like a nail file. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

Arthur blinked and frowned. Was this tiny woman wielding a nail file and threatening him? Perhaps his mind was still playing tricks on him. Not sleeping for two days tended to do that to a person. Still, he didn't really want to tangle with an armed woman, so he raised his arms in a gesture of peace.

"I'm Arthur. You know, the one who owns this place?"

The woman continued staring at him, then lowered the nail file. "Morgana's brother. I suppose you bear a resemblance. Do you have ID on you?"

"Excuse me, but you're the one breaking and entering here." Arthur crossed his arms and leaned against the door frame. She didn't look like she was about to lunge at him with the nail file, which was a good thing. She didn't look like she was about to leave either, which was less than ideal because the last thing Arthur wanted was to look after a homeless waif.

Her eyes narrowed and she lifted her head. "I did not break in. I used a key. A key which Morgana gave me."

"Who are you? And why is Morgana giving the keys to my place away?"

"She took a sudden holiday so she couldn't housesit and -"

The idea of Morgana housesitting was the last straw and, exhausted and annoyed, Arthur snapped. "If you truly knew my sister, you would know that she hates this place. It's in the middle of nowhere. And I never asked her to housesit. I suggest you leave right now, or I'll call the police."

For a brief moment, uncertainty crossed the woman's face, but she hid it quickly. "Morgana said I could use this cottage for a while."

"Pay attention," said Arthur, his patience hanging by a thread. He wanted to sleep, not deal with some nutty woman. "This is my place. You are not welcomed here."

This time, her confident demeanor evaporated and all of a sudden, she looked younger and vulnerable. Arthur frowned. He didn't want her to look vulnerable. He wanted her out of his house. She didn't say anything immediately but Arthur could see that her brain was whirling with thoughts.

Then she sighed. "I'll be honest with you. I don't actually have a place to stay right now and it's almost midnight. And as you said, it is the middle of nowhere."

She was right. Even he couldn't turn a homeless woman out.

"Fine," he said. "You can take the spare room over there. But just for tonight. Tomorrow, you'll need to find somewhere else to stay. This isn't a home for lost girls."

"Thank you!" Her face broke into a smile, lighting up her eyes and for a while, Arthur couldn't tear his eyes from her.

Obviously, he was sleep and woman-deprived. With a grunt, he went back into his room, slammed the door shut so she knew how much he didn't want her there and collapsed into his bed, letting sleep claim him.

* * *

><p>Gwen's heart was pounding so hard, she felt that it might burst out of her ribcage and make a dash for it. Once the door slammed, she let out the breath she had been holding. The worse thing was that she wasn't sure if her heart was racing because she was a hair breadth away from being thrown out of the cottage or because she had been standing within touching distance of a very sexy, mostly naked man. It had taken all of her willpower not to let her eyes drift any lower than his collar bone.<p>

Taking a few bracing breaths, Gwen picked up her duffel bag, then walked to the room that Arthur had gestured to. A single bed called out to her and gratefully, she sank into its embrace and closed her eyes. Tomorrow, she told herself. Tomorrow she would sort out the mess she was in.

Light. Coffee. Gwen blinked a few times. Why was her bed next to the window? Then, she remembered. Naked man. Nail file. Morgana. She had to get hold of Morgana and find out what on earth was happening. Morgana had promised Gwen that her step-brother wouldn't be home for at least two months and Gwen could use the cottage as a retreat to write her book, if she was willing to housesit.

She rummaged through her purse, finally emptying it on the bed, before she found her phone. A few taps and she was connected to Morgana. Actually, she was connected to Morgana's voice mail. Gwen tried again but much to her frustration, she kept getting Morgana's voice mail. After her fourth try, Gwen tossed her phone onto the bed, then flopped back down on it, burying her face into the pillow. The smell of coffee that wafted into the room told her that Arthur was up

and about. If she left the room, she would have to face him. Immediately, her mind flashed back to his rumpled, mostly naked state and she felt heat burn in her cheeks. She couldn't face him. Maybe she could stay in this room forever.

Her bladder didn't like that plan and made its objection known quite urgently.

Checking that she looked somewhat presentable, Gwen grabbed her toiletries and peered out of the room. She didn't see anyone in the living room so slowly, she crept out. She knew which door led to Arthur's room so the other door had to be the bathroom. When she made it successfully into the bathroom, Gwen closed the door, leaning against it in relief.

A quick shower later, Gwen was feeling much better and a lot more in control. All she had to do was to explain to Arthur how this whole situation came about and surely he would help her find a solution. After all, he had a reputation for being generous and kind, if somewhat private. Unlike Morgana, Arthur Penn didn't court the limelight. He attended charity events occasionally, gifting large donations, but was rarely part of the social scene that Morgana travelled in.

Giving herself a quick pep talk, Gwen opened the door and stepped out. The cottage was still empty and she wondered if Arthur was trying to avoid her. Perhaps he expected her to clear out by the time he returned. Something she would have done, if she hadn't rented out her apartment. Gwen went back to the guest room, made her bed and ran a brush through her hair. She might not be able to hide in this room forever, but she could definitely try. Pulling out her battered notebook and pen, Gwen settled down on the bed and within minutes, she had drifted off to a land of dragons, magic and princesses

She wasn't sure how long she'd been making notes when the knock came.

"Are you planning to hide in there forever?"

"Of course not," Gwen said, scrambling off the bed. Tucking her notebook under the pillow, she walked to the door and opened it.

Arthur stood across the threshold, in a tight cotton tee and shorts that moulded to his very fine butt. His hair was damp and slicked back and a thin layer of sweat suggested that he'd just returned from some exercise. When she exercised, she looked like a drowned rat. Arthur apparently looked like a cover model with aesthetically pleasing sweat.

"Are you done looking at me?"

Heat rushed through Gwen but she made herself meet his gaze. "I'm just repaying the favour. You took a good look last night."

"That was because I was surprised to find a strange woman breaking into my home in the middle of the night."

"It's not breaking in if I have the key."

"A key you claim my mysteriously uncontactable step-sister gave you." He raised an eyebrow. "Maybe you lifted it from my sister. God knows how careless she can be with her belongings. Was she at some party where you waited and she conveniently left her purse on the table?"

Gwen wondered how much she would regret marring that gorgeous face by punching it. Not much, she suspected. But she would probably regret being sent to jail for assault. Maybe.

"Do you also think I murdered your sister and that's why she's uncontactable now?" Her fingers curled into her palms, just in case she changed her mind. After all a stint in jail might add some authenticity to her writing. Didn't the best authors always go through some form of hardship?

One side of his lips quirked. "I might give you a reward for that. Did you do it quickly? Or did she suffer?"

Unnerved by his sudden good humour, Gwen's immediate reaction was to scowl at him, which turned the little smirk on his face into a full-blown smile.

Then, he gestured to the kitchen. "How about some breakfast before you leave? I make a mean scrambled eggs."

"Leave?"

The smile faded. "Well, yes. Whatever it is Morgana told you, obviously I am here now so you can't stay."

"Right. Remember I told you last night that I didn't have a place to stay? Funny thing but I still don't have a place to stay now."

"The city is about a two hour drive away. You can probably find a bed and breakfast there," said Arthur, the warm humour that had been in his voice just moments ago replaced by a coolness that made Gwen even more defensive.

"I cannot afford to stay at a bed and breakfast for a month."

Arthur shrugged and turned away. "That's hardly my problem. This is my house and unfortunately, as I said last night, you can't stay."

Panicked, Gwen reached out and grabbed his arm, stopping him from walking away. His skin was warm and smooth, and he didn't pull away, although he frowned at her. "Look, I appreciate that you don't want me here but Morgana promised me that I could stay here for 2 months and so I rented out my own apartment -"

This time, he pulled his arm from her grip. "Do you want money? I admit that this is a new scam but if money will get you to leave, then fine. How much do you want?"

The urge to punch him rose in Gwen again but instead she sucked in a breath. "I don't want money. I don't even want to stay here anymore, especially not with you around. But I don't seem to have much of a choice."

"You know, for someone who wants to persuade me to let her stay in my house, you're being very disagreeable."

"That happens when you're accused of being a thief, then a scam artist," muttered Gwen, even as the more sensible part of her brain told her that she should really be scraping at his feet for his goodwill. Yet, there was something about him that roused her ire. She closed her eyes, willing her temper to subside. She needed to channel Heather, the calm, patient and level-headed dragon rider from her book. "I don't have money but I have skills. I can cook and clean this place in exchange for you letting me stay on. And you won't even know I'm here. I'll stay in the room most of the time and out of your way."

Arthur dragged a hand through his hair.

Gwen bit her bottom lip and tried to look vulnerable, widening her eyes slightly and bowing her head. "If you throw me out, I'll have to sleep on the streets. Morgana would not be happy."

Arthur closed his eyes and let out a sigh. "You are a manipulative one and I am going to regret this, but fine. You can stay in the guest room. Just keep out of my way."

"Thank you. I promise that you wouldn't know I'm here."

"I doubt it," he said before he disappeared into his bedroom and slammed his door again.

* * *

><p>Written for the April roundtablemanagers prompt (check the tumblr out!). I told myself I would finish my WIPs, and then I wrote this instead. I have no self control. :((((<p>

2. Chapter 2

He didn't know her name or how she knew Morgana. And yet, he'd told her she could stay. What a fool. For all he knew, she really was a scam artist. A pretty face, a sob story and he was easy pickings. Arthur picked up the soap and rubbed it over his chest with much more force than necessary. At least, thinking of her meant he wasn't replaying the surgery from yesterday over and over again.

And she was easy to think about.

From behind his closed lids, her image floated in front of him. Her curls were loose around her shoulders, framing her face with those brown eyes that threatened to drown him. Her hair, he imagined, would feel like silk against his body, and would smell like flowers. He wondered if the freckles that dusted across her nose and cheeks could also be found on other hidden parts of her body. He let out a groan, thankful that the water masked it, as his soapy hand drifted lower and his fingers, without thinking, wrapped around his quickly stiffening length.

The smell of bacon, eggs and toast assaulted him when he stepped out of his bedroom. His stomach immediately rumbled, pleased at the prospect of breakfast that was not cold cereal or an energy bar.

Stepping into the kitchen, Arthur saw Gwen at the sink, her hair now tied up into a messy bun, doing some washing. The dress she wore skimmed her curves and the sunlight that filled the kitchen made her hair and skin glow like an angel.

He scowled, annoyed at his attraction to her and annoyed that she was already breaking her promise to stay out of his way.

"Hey!" She swung around, a spatula still in her hand and a bright smile on her face. "I made breakfast."

"I didn't ask for breakfast." He knew he sounded rude and ungrateful, but he hadn't asked her to cook him breakfast and he hadn't asked her to stand around in his kitchen, reminding him of things he couldn't have. As an example of just how petulant and childish he could be, Arthur crossed over to the larder and pulled out a box of cereal and as she silently watched, poured a bowl of it, poured milk over it, then studiously ignoring the large plate of breakfast, shoved a spoon of cereal into his mouth.

She laughed.

He looked up and glared at her.

"You are a child." Then she turned back to the sink, finished up the washing, picked up a plate of food and walked out of the kitchen.

Once Arthur was sure she'd gone back into the guest room, he took a few more mouthfuls of his cereal. After checking once more that he was alone in the kitchen, he took a piece of bacon from the plate next to him. Then, since it would be a waste to not eat the rest of the food, Arthur ate it all. The warm shower and the warm breakfast combined forces and a pleasant haze of drowsiness settled over him. He dropped the plates into the sink, then padded over to the living room. He passed the shut door of his guest room, and he paused. Guilt tugged at him. He wasn't usually so rude, but there was something about this woman that made him feel both defensive and on the edge.

Arthur made a sharp turn, and before he could talk himself out of it, rapped on the door.

He heard movement, swear words and a soft oof, before the door finally swung open.

"Can I help you?" She lifted her brows and tilted her head.

"I don't know your name," he said gruffly. He shoved his hands into his jeans so he wouldn't be tempted to tuck the stray curl behind her ear.

"Guinevere, but most people call me Gwen."

"And how do you know Morgana?"

"I interviewed her for Gemstone Magazine and we hit it off. We've been friends for a while."

"Right. And how long do you plan to stay here?"

The coolness in her gaze faded and Arthur thought that he could see her cheeks flush slightly. "Morgana said that you like your privacy, which is why you bought this place."

"Morgana talks too much."

"And I know I'm encroaching on your privacy. I'm really sorry but -"

Arthur waved a hand. "I already said you could stay."

Her expression brightened and Arthur took a step back, unnerved by how much he liked her smile. He didn't want to create connections with anyone, and definitely not anyone who looked like her and who would leave in two months.

"Thank you. If you give me a list of things you want me to do -"

"I don't want you to do anything. Just do whatever you wanted to do here and keep out of my way."

Her smile dimmed. "I'll stay in this room as much as I can."

"Good," he said. Shoving his hands back into his pocket, he turned around before he remembered why he'd knocked on the door in the first place. "Breakfast was good. Thank you."

She made a noise, a cross between a snort and a laugh. "You ate it."

"Didn't want it to go to waste."

"Of course."

He walked to his sofa, painfully aware that she was watching him. It was only after he sank into the sofa that he heard the door close quietly. He pulled out his phone.

What the hell are you up to, Morgana?

She didn't answer, not that he'd expected her to. He texted Merlin next, asking for updates on the emergency ward. Did they need him back? Because he could return to work any time. Now, preferably. It was only an hour and a half drive away.

txt me again abt work n i will tell on u.

Use English, Merlin.

i m wrking er - no time 4 grmar.

Arthur rolled his eyes, then dropped his phone onto the sofa. He switched on the television and cycled through the channels, until he came to a soap opera. Brainless and entertaining. Just what he needed.

* * *

><p>Gwen fluctuated between feeling guilty and feeling annoyed. How rude was Arthur? The breakfast had been a gesture of goodwill, an attempt at starting over, but he'd barely spared it a glance before grabbing his cereal. And when their eyes had met, he'd seemed almost angry with her. For cooking breakfast.<p>

What an ass.

Only, now, as she looked at him asleep on the sofa, one arm thrown across his face, she felt guilty. This was clearly his sanctuary, his escape and she, someone he didn't know at all, had invaded it. Gwen tried to remember what Morgana had said about her brother, but aside from the fact that he was a surgeon and worked at Albion Mercy, Gwen knew nothing about him.

Lying across the sofa, Arthur's face was relaxed and his lips slightly parted. His other arm lay across his stomach, rising and falling as he breathed. The t-shirt he wore had ridden up and a strip of bare skin caught Gwen's eyes. He had nice legs, Gwen thought, and he was clearly in good shape. But then, she remembered the dark smudged under his eyes and the tension lines in his face at breakfast.

She didn't know why he needed a sanctuary. She didn't know why he was so exhausted that he was napping before lunch. And she didn't know why she was feeling concern for him.

With a shake of her head, Gwen picked up the remote control and switched the television off. The past two hours in the room had been completely unproductive and she was planning to go for a walk, see the surroundings and perhaps get her creative muse back. The whole idea of coming here for two months was to try and work through her writer's block. Back home, in her small apartment, she'd been feeling trapped, bored and overwhelmed by the increasing demands of her father. Then, Morgana had offered her Arthur's cottage as an escape.

Look where that had gotten her. Instead of finding her creativity in a gorgeous little cottage, she was stuck with Mr Rude and Too Sexy and she had little hope that this would help with her writer's block. Perhaps she should turn her book into a bodice ripper, starring Mr Rude and Too Sexy. Or a murder mystery.

She'd barely pulled on her boots, when she heard Arthur move.

"Where are you going?" His voice was rough with sleep, and when she looked over at him, his hair was mussed and his eyes, half-lidded. In response, her treacherous body heated up.

"Out," she squeaked. She cleared her throat and tried again. "Out for a walk."

He eased himself off the sofa and ran a hand through his hair, succeeding only in messing it up more and somehow making himself even more attractive. "I gathered that. Do you even know this area?"

"I won't go far."

He frowned and blinked a few times. "Give me a moment. I'll go with you."

"Why?"

"Because you don't know this area and I don't want to have to rescue you later when you invariably get yourself into trouble."

"I am perfectly capable of looking after myself."

Arthur grunted. "No, you're not. You don't even have proper shoes. Those are city boots. Let me just get my shoes."

"Brilliant," said Gwen. That murder mystery was sounding like a better idea. She could write a whole chapter dedicated to the slow and painful death of Arthur Penn.

Once Arthur got his shoes on, they stepped out of the cottage. Having arrived in the middle of the night, she hadn't quite had the chance to see the surroundings of the cottage. They walked in silence, Gwen slightly behind Arthur who had muttered something about a scenic route, stuffed his hands into his pockets then marched on ahead.

It definitely was a scenic route, although Gwen caught herself looking at Arthur's back and bum instead of the lush fields that surround them. It was his fault she couldn't stop sneaking glances at him. Surely there had to be a rule somewhere about men wearing too tight jeans and t-shirts.

"Keep up." He turned just as she was scowling at his bum. "What's wrong? Are you tired already? It's those awful, impractical boots you have on."

She glared at him. "I'm fine. Just keep moving."

He looked like he was about to say something, then stopped and continued stomping on all the poor vegetation that got in his way.

There was a rough path which Arthur kept to and it led Gwen through a wide field that was blanketed with wildflowers of various hues, and Gwen paused every now and then to take a few photos. Even though at times, Arthur had had to stop for her to take her photos, he said nothing, simply standing there until she was ready to walk again. Every now and then, as she fussed with the camera settings on her phone, Gwen could feel his eyes on her but when she looked at him, he would avert his eyes.

He was right about her boots. As good as they looked on her feet, they were not made for walking on uneven land and several times, her heel would catch on something or it would sink into the soil and she would have to take a moment to regain her balance. Most of this happened behind Arthur's back, much to Gwen's relief, because he might be right, but that didn't mean she wanted him to know he was right.

Gwen had stopped to take a photo of some bluebells. Crouching down and balancing delicately on her heeled boots, she focused her camera on the flowers. Some distance away, Arthur stood, staring pensively into the distance, his handsome profile outlined by the blue sky. For some reason, Gwen moved her phone, until Arthur was centered on the screen. Before she could think twice, her thumb slid over the shutter

button and she snapped a photo of him. As if in penance, she quickly took multiple photos of the bluebells before standing up.

They continued walking, past fields holding cows, sheep and the occasional horses. Morgana wasn't lying about just how beautiful this part of Albion was.

"Morgana doesn't come here often?"

Arthur slowed, allowing her to fall into step with him. "Only when she wants something from me. She definitely doesn't house sit."

"What do you think she's up to?"

He stopped and turned to face her. "Probably thinks that you can fix me."

"Why do you need fixing?"

He snorted, then continued walking. "I don't. So don't even try."

Gwen watched as he walked onwards, wondering if she wanted to push the matter. "It's probably your bad manners," she called out. "That's what needs fixing."

"Nothing says good manners like imposing yourself on someone's hospitality."

He had a point and the guilt that she'd managed to ignore came flaring to life in her. For all his brusqueness, it wasn't his fault that he'd been thrown into this position. Reaching out, she touched him, her fingers brushing against his elbow.

"I'm sorry."

Perhaps if she called her agent, they would be able to nicely evict her tenant and she would be able to give Arthur back his house and his isolation.

He sighed, then pulled away from her touch by lifting his hand to run it through his hair. "I'm sorry as well. It seems to me that it's all Morgana's fault. And as you can tell, I am not exactly wanting company."

"I'll keep out of your hair."

He stuffed his hands in his pockets again, then rocked back on his heels. "I'm sure we can work something out. Looks, it's almost lunch time. I've frozen pizza back home."

"A man after my own heart," Gwen said teasingly, wanting to build on what seemed like a thaw in their relationships.

But Arthur frowned. "I don't need fixing." And then, he stalked off back in the direction of the house.

Gwen thought there was clearly something going on with Arthur, but whatever tricks Morgana had up her sleeves, there was no way Gwen was going to be sucked into it. All she needed to do was to keep out of

Arthur's way and finish the first draft of her book.

By the time, they reached Arthur's house, Gwen's feet and ankles were hurting. Pulling off her boots, she perched on the sofa and rubbed her feet. Arthur saw her, lifted his eyebrows as if saying I told you, then shrugged and walked into the kitchen. Childishly, she stuck out her tongue at his retreating back. After the blood started flowing through her feet, she walked into the kitchen and watched appreciatively as he bent over to dig out the frozen pizzas from the freezer.

For all his faults, he did have a very nice bum.

"Mushroom and chicken ok with you?"

"Yeah. Anything I can do to help?"

"Plates are above the sink. And cutlery, in the drawer next to the sink." Arthur stood, ruining the view for Gwen.

"Ok."

The kitchen wasn't very big, which meant that as she set the table and as Arthur popped the pizzas into the small oven, they were often bumping into each other. At one point, Gwen turned, plates in her hands, right smack into Arthur.

Immediately, his hands landed on her hips, steadying her.

They were standing so close, Gwen thought she could get a whiff of the cologne he used - something woody. Only the plates that she was holding separated their chests. His eyes looked darker and Arthur didn't seem as if he was going to move.

"Sorry." She had been aiming for friendly, but somehow that one word came out breathy.

One of his hands left her hips and pushed a strand of her hair off her face.

Gwen stared at him, staring back at her.

Oh god, he was going to kiss her. And Gwen knew that instead of pushing away or kneeling him in the groin, she was going to let him kiss her.

She licked her lips.

His eyes darted to them.

Then, suddenly, Arthur was no longer in front of her, his hand no longer on her hip. "There's another 10 minutes before the pizza is ready. We can eat in front of the television."

And Gwen was alone in the kitchen, the plates still clutched to her chest. She closed her eyes and wondered why she was actually feeling sad that Arthur Penn, the pain in the ass, hadn't kissed her. Heather would roll her eyes and thank the dragons that Arthur hadn't tried anything. Heather wouldn't be standing in the kitchen, feeling rejected.

But maybe, a little shake up in Heather's romantic life was what was needed. Placing the plates on the counter, Gwen went back into the guest room and pulled out her notebook. Heather had been in an established relationship with Nani, but now, as Gwen's mind raced, a new dragon rider appeared, all swagger and confidence and Heather both disliked and lusted over her.

As Gwen put her notebook back under the pillow, she smiled. Perhaps this little stay in Arthur's cottage would be just what she needed.

* * *

><p>AN: Hope you enjoyed this! Thank you for all the lovely comments, although no one actually told me to stop and go work on my WIPs ...<p>

3. Chapter 3

He'd suggested eating in front of the television but coward that he was, Arthur found himself eating his pizza in his bedroom, which was an example of everything that was wrong with this arrangement. Ordinarily, the idea of bringing food into his room would have horrified Arthur, and yet it was preferable to spending more time with Gwen. Although the door to his room was closed, he could hear the muffled sounds from the television. In his mind, he could picture Gwen sitting on the sofa. He imagined that she was the sort who sat on sofas with their legs crossed, the plate of pizza balancing delicately on her lap as she flicked through the channels. He wondered what she would watch. A nature documentary? She'd seemed utterly fascinated by the flowers they had passed that morning. Or maybe she was like Sophia who enjoyed crime drama.

Arthur had never brought Sophia here - their relationship crumbling just as he started the buying process of this house, which was unfortunate since he'd bought this house, planning to propose to Sophia. One year later and thinking about Sophia still made his heart hurt. They had been the golden couple, both literally and metaphorically. She was bubbly and gregarious, leading him through all the social events that his father forced on him. When Sophia was by his side, Arthur had felt like he could do anything, even tolerate his father's not so subtle attempts to get him to change specialisation.

And then, it had all blown up in his face and he was left with this house that he didn't even like all that much.

Annoyed that he was dredging up memories that he had buried long ago, Arthur slammed his plate of half-eaten pizza onto his bedside table. He wasn't hungry anymore and it was high time that Morgana explained herself.

To his surprise, she answered on the third ring.

"Dad didn't tell me that you were on extended leave. I hope you haven't frightened Gwen away!"

"A bear couldn't frighten your friend away. Why did you tell her she

could stay here?"

"Look, you have barely stayed in that place since you bought it and that happened. And Gwen needed an escape. Seemed like a good idea. How was I supposed to know that Dad put you on extended leave?"

"Dad did not put me on extended leave."

Disbelief laced Morgana's voice. "Really, because you would take three weeks off work of your own accord? You haven't taken a break since - you know what, maybe it would be good for you to play host to Gwen. She's a wonderful person. Warm, talented and fun."

"Morgana," said Arthur warningly, but she ignored him and pressed on.

"I'm not asking you to get into a relationship with her. In fact, don't. She deserves someone better than you. But you could do with a friend who isn't as useless as Merlin."

"Morgana! I'm here because I want to sell the place." That shut her up.

"Good," she finally said. "That's good."

"Yeah. Anyway, your friend can stay. I told her she could."

"I wasn't trying to interfere, Arthur. I really thought the place would be empty."

Arthur sighed. "Next time, ask me first before you start giving away my things."

"As I said, it would be good for you to have a friend who isn't Merlin." In the background, Arthur heard the beginnings of baby crying and he smiled. Morgana, a mother. That was something he'd never thought would happen. Of the two of them, he was the one who always seemed more likely to go the traditional route - marriage and babies while Morgana made her way through all of polite and impolite society. But look at them now. "Gerty is up. Want to talk to her?"

"Of course. Put her on."

Gertrude whined into Arthur's ear for a good minute or so before she finally broke into a full power cry. Morgana took her away.

"She says she misses you."

"I suspect she misses her food more than me."

"Go. I'll explain things to her. Say hi to Gwaine and the little one for me."

"You should come visit," said Morgana.

"I will. Maybe after I sell this place."

They spoke a while more about Gwaine and Gertrude, their adopted daughter, while carefully avoiding talking about their father. Then,

Morgana made him promise to be good to Gwen upon the threat of having his genitals slowly and painfully removed. After Arthur put down the phone, he thought he could hear singing. He opened his door slightly, curious as to what Gwen was up to. From where he stood, he caught glimpses of her dancing as she sung in the kitchen, twirling with the empty pizza box. Her hair bounced, catching the sunlight at times, and her smile was wide and infectious, like germs.

Despite his better judgement, Arthur stood at his door, watching her, mesmerised. What kind of life did she live? Was she always so happy, so free? Or was she running away from something as well? He scowled at himself. He did not want answers to these questions. What he wanted was to sell off this place quickly, return to the city and to his job where he could stop having utterly pointless thoughts.

When she slowed down and her singing stopped, he quickly slipped back into his bedroom and closed the door. Leaning against it, he let out a breath and closed his eyes. Immediately, his mind went back to There were many reasons not to get involved with Gwen. First, she was Morgana's friend. Second, she was not his type - he tended to prefer blondes. Most importantly, she looked like the type who threw her whole heart into everything and Arthur could not offer her the same.

Merlin, you know how you've always wanted to see my place in the country? Come by after your shift. Bring dinner and drinks for 3.

Arthur tossed his phone on the bed, picked up his plate and took a deep breath. It was ridiculous to hide in here. He was a grown man and he shouldn't be afraid of that small slip of a woman, dancing in his kitchen.

Right, said a small voice in his head. That's why you practically begged Merlin to come over.

* * *

><p>Normally, Gwen enjoyed a decent crime show, and she usually didn't mind reruns. But although a rerun of her favourite crime duo were currently bickering on television, her mind was more preoccupied with the difficult, sulky man hiding in his bedroom. She took a bite of her pizza and contemplated him. Arthur Penn was a doctor, a well-regarded one according to Morgana, although there might have been some sibling bias at work. Gwen had a hard time picturing the petulant and childish Arthur actually being a doctor. Did he stomp off in a huff if a patient questioned him?<p>

Still, despite his faults, Gwen had to admit that he was a very nice male specimen, and the strange push-pull energy that existed between them was definitely helping with her book. Selina might not be male, but in every other way, she was Arthur Penn. The top medic in the Dragon Forces, arrogant and curt. Heather loathed the way Selina treated others, and yet she felt a dangerous attraction to Selina, one that she was determined never to act on, especially with a war looming around the corner.

As disastrous as this writing retreat had started out, it was clearly paying off. Gwen hadn't been this excited about her novel in months and if she kept this up, she might just be able to submit a draft to

her editor before the deadline. Pleased with herself, Gwen swiped up the crumbs from her plate and moved to the kitchen, eager to finish up lunch and work on her book. It started with a hum, then as she reached the chorus of the song and the kitchen, she started to sing, the songs simply bubbling out of her. For months, she'd been struggling with her writing, her enthusiasm for her book dwindling with every day that she sat at her desk, staring at a blank page that stared back at her. Her editor had called a few times, wanting updates and Gwen had, much to her shame, lied about how much she was getting done.

And now, it was like she'd stepped out of a fog. Her mind was working again, her imagination spinning at full speed and her limbs all ready to write.

It was brilliant and she was feeling positively giddy.

She twirled around the kitchen island, and grabbed the empty pizza box that Arthur had tossed on it. She sang the chorus once more with feeling, swung the pizza box around before dumping it into the bin and striking what Gwen thought was a suitable, post dance pose.

Gwen had just washed her plate when she heard footsteps.

"Want me to wash that for you?" She reached out for the plate, unfazed when Arthur hesitated. It was obvious that his first reaction to anything she did was rejection. "Come on. I'm already at the sink."

He handed the plate over and muttered a thank you.

Gwen expected him to return to his room but instead he stood there, leaning against the kitchen island, watching her. With a shrug, she turned back to the sink and started washing. Placing the plate on the dish rack, she turned back to see Arthur still standing there, arms folded across his broad chest and his eyes tracking her movement.

"Are you about to critique my washing technique?"

"There is a dishwasher."

"For two plates? It wasn't a problem." Gwen wiped her damp hands on her jeans. "So, what do you do when you're here? Garden? Some DIY fix-it thing?"

The question seemed to surprise him and he frowned. "There's a stream nearby. I might do some fishing."

"Really? You don't seem like the fishing sort."

His lips twitched, almost forming a smile. "And what sort do I seem?"

"With your looks, I imagine that you would spend your free time wining, dining and bedding - uh - animals? I mean, you look like an animal lover, and by bedding, I mean giving them a loving home -" Gwen could feel the heat in her cheeks and she cursed the lack of a filter between her thoughts and her mouth.

This time, Arthur's lips were definitely curved into a smile. "I do like animals, actually."

"So do I!" Perhaps she could steer the conversation to something innocent, like animals, which she had already tainted. So, instead, she said inanely, "I like dogs."

"Me too. I used to have one when I was a kid, but he died a few years ago. Even my father managed to look sad about it."

Gwen nodded. "I always wanted a dog but living in a small apartment in the city meant that I couldn't really get one. Plus, I couldn't manage both a dog and my father."

"Your father?"

"He's not well. Cancer. You know." Gwen tugged at her hair. She didn't like talking about her father and she wasn't about to spill her heart to Arthur. "Happens all the time."

But his hand was suddenly covering hers, a warm, solid, comforting weight. "I'm sorry. It's not easy."

"No, but so far the prognosis has been good." Gwen tried for a smile, but she suspected that it didn't quite reach her eyes, because Arthur was now looking at her with soft, sympathetic eyes. This was probably why he was a good doctor. All he had to do was to turn his doe eyes on a patient and they would feel better.

"Where is he now?"

"My brother is looking after him," Gwen said, pulling her hand away. "I called him just before lunch and he was feeling fine."

"Hey, I wasn't suggesting that you weren't looking after him."

"Of course not." Gwen knew she was being unreasonable, but she didn't need Arthur judging her or surfacing all the guilt and fear that she buried in her heart. "I need to work on my writing now."

Arthur nodded but said nothing, except to watch her with those eyes.

Just as she reached the door to her room, he finally spoke. "I'm driving down to the town. Do you need me to pick up anything?"

"The fridge is empty, so I guess we'll need food for dinner."

"A friend is coming over with dinner."

"Ok." Gwen walked back into her room and shut the door. She wondered if Arthur's friend was more than a friend. After all, Morgana had said that Arthur had bought this place to be alone, which meant anyone he brought over should be special. She couldn't believe that she was feeling pangs of jealousy.

But Heather would feel the same way, and she would feel just as annoyed.

Gwen took her notebook out, uncapped her pen and started to write.

* * *

><p>"You wrote The Dragon Egg!" Merlin exclaimed, his drink splashing out of the bottle in his excitement. "I love it. And you're here working on the sequel? Oh my god. I'm going to bring my copy of the book the next time I come and you have to autograph it for me."<p>

From his position on the armchair, Arthur watched as Gwen blushed prettily under Merlin's heaping of praise. He had no idea what book it was that Gwen was the author of - fantasy wasn't quite his choice of reading material - but Merlin was clearly thrilled. Inviting Merlin over was a stroke of genius on his part. Surely his lavish praise would help Gwen get over her writer's block.

"Do you know that Arthur has never invited me over here, despite the blatant hints that I've dropped over the years. Then suddenly, he texts me, practically demanding that I come by for dinner."

Gwen looked curiously at him. "I guess this used to be a private place, until I crashed into it."

Arthur stood. "Ice cream? Merlin brought some."

"I was surprised when he bought it. If you know Arthur, you know he is a city boy -"

"Merlin. Show me where you put the ice cream."

"It's in -"

"Merlin."

Once they stepped into the kitchen, Arthur turned to Merlin. "She is a guest. Not our new best friend. Stop talking about me."

Merlin shrugged as he opened the freezer. "She's Morgana's friend. I'm sure she knows a lot about you. I bet Morgana showed her embarrassing baby photos." The ice cream tub in his hands, Merlin grinned. "I'm glad you have company while you're here. I confess I was a bit worried when you told me you were going to spend your leave here."

"I'm a big boy," said Arthur. "Living alone in the country would hardly be dangerous."

"I wasn't worried about your physical safety. More like your emotional well-being." Merlin glanced at the living room, then lowered his voice. "Being here, with all the memories -"

"I've never been here for more than a day. There aren't any memories."

"You know, if you don't talk about it, it's just going to eat you up from the inside."

Arthur scowled. "When did you change specialisation to psychiatry?"

Merlin let out a long sigh. "Fine. Be like that. Now, I'm going to serve my favourite author some ice cream."

Merlin hung around for a while more, spending most of his time trying to wheedle out spoilers from Gwen's sequel, but Gwen was adept at fending him off. They played a card game before Merlin said he had to go before it got too late.

Gwen was straightening the cushions on the sofa when Arthur came back from walking Merlin out.

"You really don't have to do any housework to stay here."

Clutching a cushion to her chest, Gwen smiled slightly. "I feel bad for invading your sanctuary."

Arthur snorted. "I don't know what Morgana has been telling you, but one reason I have never invited Merlin over is that I don't come here."

"Not to fish?"

"You were right about me not being the fishing sort."

"To escape your high pressure job?"

A slight frown marred her forehead, and the urge to run his thumb over the slight lines to smoothen them out suddenly gripped Arthur. He slid his hands into his pockets. "No," he said, aware that the word came out a little harshly.

"Why are you here now?"

"I'm here to pack this place up, then put it on the market to be sold."

She blinked, the frown deepening. "So it's not your sanctuary."

"It's not. I hate this place and the quicker I get rid of it, the better. But you can stay for now. I doubt that I'm going to get it sold so quickly."

He could see all the questions in her eyes. Writers, he supposed, were nosy sorts. But all she did was place the cushion back onto the sofa.

"Good night, Arthur. I enjoyed meeting Merlin." Gwen stood in the middle of the living room, looking at him. The dim lights made her look even softer, almost vulnerable, and that pull of attraction he'd felt towards her seemed to tug even harder, drawing him to stand closer to her.

"Good night, Gwen."

Desire, want and need shimmered between them. She could feel it too. Her lips were parted, her chest rising and falling while her eyes bore into his. It would be so easy to close that distance, brush his lips against hers and quench the fires that were slowly kindling in him.

But fires burned and Arthur wasn't interested in getting burnt again.

So he took a step backward, turned and walked away.

* * *

><p>AN: Thank you for the comments! :DD This is a slightly different take I guess, but disclaimer: I have no clue what doctors do.<p>

4. Chapter 4

"Good morning. Nothing in the fridge so all we have is coffee." Arthur gestured to the pot on the counter and tried not to notice that Gwen's choice of sleepwear was a loose t-shirt and very tiny shorts.

She yawned, stretched and ran a hand over her face, revealing to him a tiny stretch of skin between the band of her shorts and her top. Who knew that could be so sexy?

"I hope you slept well."

Gwen cocked her head and looked at him, amusement in her eyes. "You must have slept well since you're being all friendly."

He shook his head and poured a mug of coffee, passing it to her. She flashed him a smile and cradled it in her hands.

"Since the fridge is still empty, I'm going to pop down to town to pick some things up." He meant only to inform her, but, clearly distracted by how adorable she looked, sleepy and smiley, he continued. "If you want to come along -"

"Oh yes! It would be great to see the town." She smiled at him over the mug, her eyes brightening. "We could have lunch there?"

There was no way Arthur could say no to her. "Sure. The Internet tells me that there's a nice pub in the town that serves great fish and chips."

"Sounds good. When do you want to leave?" She was practically bouncing and a strange feeling unfurled in his chest.

"Half an hour?"

"I'll be ready." She took another sip of her coffee, then smiled at him.

True to her word, in exactly half an hour, she walked out of her room, in another pair of shorts that didn't hide much more and with the added temptation of brown shoulders revealed by the tank top she now wore. Sunglasses dangled from her hand and she grinned when she saw him.

"Let's go."

"I was hoping to get to sit in your car." She climbed in, then wriggled in the seat in the most distracting way. Then, to compound his discomfort, she sighed, a long, sultry sigh. "Oh. These seats are the best."

Arthur quickly started the car engine and pulled out of the driveway before he lost his mind and did something like haul her over the center console and into his lap. Think of something non-sexual. "The town is small but they have all the necessities, like a supermarket, a bank, a post-office and well, other stuff that a town needs."

He made the mistake of glancing over at Gwen, who was turned towards him and had one hand tucked between her cheek and the seat. Her legs were drawn up, her knees knocking into center console. With her eyes half shut and a slight smile on her face, she looked like a satisfied cat about to purr, but it was her other hand that caught his attention. It sat, almost innocently, on the seat, but her fingers were moving, stroking the leather and for the first time, Arthur felt almost jealous of the seat. What would it feel like? Having Gwen run her fingers over his body in that manner?

Heavenly.

"Are you alright?"

He focused on the road, his fingers gripping the wheel. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I thought I heard you groan."

Embarrassment was a great antidote to horniness, Arthur realised. "It was probably the wind."

"Ok," she said. And from the corner of his eye, he saw her stroke the car seat again.

"Stop rubbing your hands over the seats. It'll wear the leather out."

She lifted her hands up, shifting so she was sitting up straight. The apology she offered sounded more amused than apologetic. Arthur turned on the radio and let the newest boy band fill the silence in the car.

First on the agenda was visiting the real estate agent.

"You're really selling this place?"

"That's what I said. Why would I lie to you?" He pushed open the door, holding it open for Gwen to walk through.

"It's such a lovely place."

"Do you want to buy it?"

"If I could, I would. I can just see myself here when I need to write. And when I'm having trouble, I could take a walk outside, breath in the fresh air, take in the gorgeous scenery and just get my writing groove going."

"Well, I'm not a writer. This shouldn't -"

"Ah!" An elderly man, one Arthur recognised as the same man who had sold him this house, walked up to them. "Dr. Penn. It's been a while."

Arthur shook his offered hand. "Mr Green."

"And you must be the lucky lady, Ms Sophia."

Gwen smiled. "Oh no. I'm Gwen. It's nice to meet you."

Immediately, Tristan Green pinned Arthur with a look, one that suggested that he'd jumped to several wrong conclusions. But Arthur wasn't in the mood to discuss his personal matters.

"I'm here about the house I bought from you."

"Yes," said Tristan warily. "The Dream Cottage."

"The Dream Cottage. What an apt name," said Gwen, clasping her hands together. "The cottage is so beautiful and it's in such a perfect location."

Tristan perked up at Gwen's words. "She is a beauty. And there's so much history behind her. Tragic but terribly romantic."

"Great," interrupted Arthur before the two of them got carried away. "So it should be easy to find a buyer for it."

The warmth drained from Tristan's face. "You have barely had it for a year."

"Yes. And now I want to sell it and seeing that you're the only real estate agent in town, I am coming to you."

"Of course. If you come to the back, we can start the paperwork."

It didn't take long and Gwen spent the time chatting with Tristan's assistant about the town. By the time Arthur scrawled his signature on the last piece of paper, Gwen was bursting with information about the town, so he let her chatter about it as they walked down to the small supermarket. She told him about the origins of the town, about Mrs Singh who lived down the road from him and the goat farm that she ran, about the old abandoned hut that sat near the lake.

He wasn't all that interested in the town but Gwen was a great storyteller, and by the time they reached the supermarket, he found himself in deep discussion with her about the possibilities of ghosts in the old abandoned hut.

"He's there, just waiting for the right moment to get his revenge. Only he doesn't realise that the man who killed him had drowned in the lake. But unlike poor Madison he's..."

"When did he get the name Madison?"

"Just now. I just thought of it," Gwen said with a touch of impatience. "Anyway, back to poor Madison who died a truly gruesome death when he was impaled by a raging unicorn..."

"And I still say unicorns are symbols of purity and goodness. They do not go round rampaging and killing innocent Madisons."

Gwen stopped walking. "You have no imagination."

Arthur rolled his eyes. "And you're morbid."

She laughed, the corner of her eyes crinkling and she placed a hand on his arm. "I'm not sure if that is a compliment, but you're not the first one to say this."

"No wonder Merlin loves your book."

"Oh, you won't find any of that in my books. My books are all very becoming." She widened her eyes and pursed her lips together, attempting, Arthur suspected, to present an innocent facade. But he knew better now and simply clucked his tongue at her, which made her dissolve into more laughter.

"I'm sure. Come, let's grab a trolley. We're going to be stuck in the cottage for a while so we might as well stock up."

He pushed the trolley and Gwen walked beside him. "This is the best way to get to know someone - grocery shopping."

He lifted an eyebrow at her, then shook his head. "I'm glad one of us is enjoying today."

Her smile widened, then slipping her arm through his, she tugged him over to the fruits section where Arthur learned that Gwen enjoyed berries. They squabbled over which pasta was best, and ended up buying both. Arthur put in a box of oatmeal for breakfast which Gwen scowled at, then she dumped in too much bacon and eggs. She supplemented it with bags of chips and a chocolate spread.

"You'll die young with eating habits like that."

"You're such a doctor."

She was possibly the only one who managed to make being a doctor sound bad.

After loading the groceries into the car, they walked to the small pub for an early lunch. It was definitely small, with seating for perhaps six or seven families, at most. But what caught Arthur's eye were the paintings that hung along the walls. They were small ones, but they were done with careful skill and passion. As Gwen walked ahead to get their seats, he lingered over the paintings, examining the strokes and the colours. Whoever had done these paintings was a pretty good artist.

He took one last look at the paintings, then turned to see Gwen chatting to the waitress. Her sunglasses were perched on her head and she was smiling and laughing. A not-unfamiliar feeling tugged at his heart.

* * *

><p>Heather had just had a heated argument with Nani, then walked

off, only to catch Selina in a tender moment with one of other riders. It made Heather feel weird. Thus far, all her interactions with Selina had been abrasive and she had liked it that way. It made her keep her distance.<p>

It was probably an aberration. Perhaps Selina had drank too much mead and it was making her mellow.

Gwen tossed her pen onto the bed, then flopped down next to it. Even villains had their soft side, but it didn't mean they stopped being villains. She had thought that Arthur and her had spent a nice morning out in town and she thought that their relationship was warming up, despite Arthur's reluctance to engage in conversation. Then, they had returned to the cottage and for a while, they, in between bumping into each other, laughed and teased as they put away the groceries.

He had just reached over her to put away one of the million boxes of oatmeal he'd bought and she'd turned to grab a bar of chocolate.

"Sorry," she murmured as she stepped onto his foot.

In reply, he said her name, low and soft, the single syllable rumbling from his chest. But before Gwen could decide if she wanted to take the plunge and kiss him the way she'd been thinking of, he'd stepped away, running one hand through his hair.

"No."

"No what?" She pressed herself against the counter and crossed her arms.

"Nothing," he muttered. "I've have stuff to do. Wasted most of the morning in town."

They were just words that Arthur flippantly tossed at her, just before he walked out of the kitchen, and he probably didn't mean anything, but Gwen felt strangely hurt. She put away what was left of the groceries, then retreated into her room and took out her notebook.

And now, after writing a scene of Selina being tender, she was lying down on her bed staring up at the very ordinary ceiling, her mind a whirl of thoughts, all focused on the man who was sharing a cottage with her. He kept blowing hot and cold with her and it was getting on her nerves. One moment he was friendly and teasing, then suddenly, he would become cold and curt. The physical attraction between them was not one-sided, Gwen was pretty sure of that. So many times she had caught him staring at her, his eyes dark with appreciation and she certainly hadn't imagined their almost kisses.

Gwen sat up. Arthur might have the emotional maturity of a baby, but she didn't and she would do something about this.

"What do you want?"

Gwen knocked on the door again. "We need to talk."

"No, we don't. We talked lots earlier."

"Don't you want to hear the ending of the Madison story?"

The door swung open and Gwen found herself face-to-face with Arthur. Which was exactly what she wanted.

"I imagine they all died painfully in the end, having been impaled by a unicorn," he said. "Or maybe a whole horde of murderous unicorns who are an utter disgrace to their species."

She couldn't help but smile at that. "Well, it's a little more complicated than that -"

"Gwen. What do you want?"

It was the first time she'd seen his bedroom, and curiosity prompted her to crane her neck and peer inside. There was a lot of brown and white and Gwen thought she saw an easel before Arthur nudged her away and shut the door.

"Have you come to spy on me?"

She glanced down at his hands, but they were spotless. They were also very nice - strong and big. They would probably feel quite nice on her body. She wondered if his hands would be smooth or rough. Both would be good.

Arthur cleared his throat. "Gwen?"

"We need to talk."

"About?"

"Us."

Arthur continued to look at her, his face expressionless, and said nothing.

"This thing between us."

"Thing?"

"I know that I basically am an unwanted visitor to your home
â€|"

"Uh huh." He rocked backwards on his heels and narrowed his eyes slightly. "I told you that you could stay."

Gwen had the sudden thought that perhaps all those almost kisses and his hooded, desirous looks at her were simply her imagination. She certainly had quite the imagination, her father often said. And now, Arthur looked far from lusting over her.

"Yes, and I'm really thankful." She shoved her hands into the back pockets of her shorts, and chewed on her bottom lip. Maybe starting this conversation was a bad idea. Maybe, in her attraction to Arthur, she'd conjured up the whole thing in her mind.

But then, Arthur's eyes dropped to her lips, and that familiar look of restrained desire flared in his eyes. He took one step closer to

her. When he finally spoke, his voice was low and rough. "And the thing you wanted to talk about?"

Their eyes locked, and Gwen found herself unable to look away. Lifting up her hand, she placed it against his cheek, feeling the slightly roughness of his five-o'clock shadow under her palm. They were so close that she thought she could feel the warmth from his body. "This," she murmured.

The moment hung there, only harsh breaths from one, or both, of them keeping time.

His hand covered hers, his fingers sliding between hers. Warm, slightly calloused. Then, like every other time, he slowly removed her hand from his face.

But this time, he didn't let go, his fingers still entwined with hers. "We can't do this."

"Why not? We're adults. Adults who are clearly attracted to each other." She pulled her hand away, anger and irritation replacing the desire that had been bubbling in her. "And you keep doing this. Being nice to me, getting close, then pushing me away."

"Because this is a bad idea. Maybe we should keep our distance from each other." True to his words, Arthur moved away and his gaze dropped to somewhere beyond her shoulder. "Since we can't be in the same room without wanting to jump on each other."

"What harm will it do?" Gwen wasn't even sure why she was pushing the matter.

Arthur met her eyes. Instead of desire or even annoyance, Gwen saw something sadder. "Someone will get hurt. And I don't need this complication in my life."

"We share a place. It will be awkward."

A reluctant smile pulled at his lips. "Believe me, I know."

"I like you."

The smile widened slightly. "I like you too, macabre ideas and all."

"Ok, so maybe acting on our attraction is a bad idea, for whatever reason you're hiding. But we can be friends, right?"

"What does that mean?"

"That means you stop suddenly cutting me off and being cold to me. Especially after we spent such a nice morning together."

"Ok."

Gwen stuck out her hand.

Arthur hesitated for a moment then enveloped her hand with his, giving it a firm shake. "Friends of some sort."

She smiled. "Friends, without benefits."

"Yeah," he said quietly. "Now what?"

"I'm actually going to take a break from writing. So perhaps I'll go for a walk, to that lake."

"You don't know where it is."

She grinned at him. "But you do. I don't suppose you're busy? Or you could give me directions."

He let out a sigh, but he was smiling. "I don't particularly want to hear that fantasy writer, Guinevere has been killed by rampaging unicorns, so I'll go with you."

"Great!"

"But before that, we should pop into town and get you proper shoes."

* * *

><p>AN: It's hard to keep them from kissing. Thanks for all the comments!<p>

End
file.